

WE have received from Dr. J. J. Mason of New York City, on two different occasions, sets of micro-photographs of thin sections of the spinal cord at different levels, and under various powers. They are by Dr. Mason himself, and are from his own preparations. They are without exception the clearest and best photographs of nerve tissue we have ever seen. Taken altogether they are so exceptionally good as to be subjects for admiration. They are among the fruits of a prolonged study of the spinal cord in lower vertebrates, upon which the author has been long engaged. Fortunately Dr. Mason has the leisure, taste and means to enable him to pursue the scientific side of a study of the nervous system, and we shall look forward with pleasant anticipation to the final results of his unselfish labor, pursued for the love of science.

THE "HAMMOND PRIZE" OF THE AMERICAN
NEUROLOGICAL ASSOCIATION.

THE American Neurological Association offers a prize of five hundred dollars, to be known as the "William A. Hammond Prize," and to be awarded at the meeting in June, 1882, to the author of the best essay on the *Functions of the Thalamus Opticus in Man*.

The conditions under which this prize is to be awarded are as follows :

1. The prize is open to competitors of all nationalities.
2. The essays are to be based upon original observations and experiments on man and the lower animals.
3. The competing essays must be written in the English, French, or German language ; if in the last, the manuscript is to be in the Italian handwriting.
4. Essays are to be sent (postage prepaid) to the Secretary of the Prize Committee, Dr. E. C. Seguin, 41 West 20th Street, New York City, on or before February 1, 1882 ; each essay to be marked by a distinctive device or motto, and accompanied by a sealed envelope bearing the same device or motto and containing the author's visiting card.
5. The successful essay will be the property of the association, which will assume the care of its publication.

6. Any intimation tending to reveal the authorship of any of the essays submitted, whether directly or indirectly conveyed to the committee, or to any member thereof, shall exclude the essay from competition.

7. The award of the prize will be announced by the undersigned committee, and will be publicly declared by the president of the association at the meeting in June, 1882.

8. The amount of the prize will be given to the successful competitor in gold coin of the United States, or, if he prefer it, in the shape of a gold medal bearing a suitable device and inscription.

(Signed) F. T. MILES, M.D., Baltimore.
J. S. JEWELL, M. D., Chicago.
E. C. SEGUIN, M. D., New York.

Two years ago we noticed and expressed our approval of a proposition to amend the Illinois law in relation to the commitment of lunatics. That measure, as is well known, failed to pass the legislature on account, we suppose, of the public sentiment of jealousy for the rights of the individual; and the jury trial of the insane, with all its disadvantages, is still the only legal method of commitment.

It is probable that a new attempt to change the law by the same or similar provisions as those then introduced will be made this winter. It is probable that it will, to some extent, meet with the same opposition; but the chance of its success is, we think, much better now than then. To insure it, however, some recognition should be given to a popular sentiment which, no matter how misdirected it may be occasionally, is founded on correct principles. Our present law does not provide against unjust commitment so well, in fact, as the law proposed as a substitute for it two years ago, and neither of them contained the necessary provisions for the protection of the insane once committed. The only real guard against abuses in our asylums, in our present law, so far as we are aware, is the provision for their inspection by the State Board of Charities. How adequate this provision is can best be understood from the following facts. The State Board of Chari-

ties consists of several professional gentlemen, one of them a physician, who serve without salary, and are obliged to borrow the time for their official duties from their daily bread-winning occupations. Their secretary, on whom really most of the actual labor of the Board devolves, is not a medical man, but a clergyman, and though an able statistician and expert in administrative matters, can hardly be expected to possess the intimate knowledge of diseases of the brain and mind that is needed to properly inspect an insane hospital and be independent, in all matters requiring medical knowledge, of the resident officials whose critic he is to be, and if he does possess this knowledge, his duties are so numerous in other directions that it would be impossible for him to properly attend to the duties of inspection. In fact, the State Board of Charities may do all that can reasonably be asked of it, and yet let this particular duty entirely alone.

The remedy for this condition of affairs is simply the appointment of a competent and otherwise well-qualified medical man as state commissioner or visitor in lunacy, who shall, acting, it may be, as regards the immediate management of the asylums, in chiefly an advisory capacity, visit each and every institution in the state unannounced and at unexpected times, as often as four times a year, and make the most thorough examination of every detail relating to the immediate care of the insane, investigate all cases of suicide, homicide, or accidental death ; hear complaints, have private interviews with patients if desired by them, inspect the diet, visit all portions of the wards at all hours, and with and without the company of the resident officers, and, in short, fulfil the functions, with perhaps less direct authority, of the English commissioners in lunacy, under whom so beneficial a change has been effected in the management of the insane in Great Britain. This officer should receive a salary commensurate with his duties, and travelling expenses. Asylum authorities should be obliged to afford him every facility, but he should be absolutely independent of them in all respects, not owing them the slightest favor, and they should have nothing to do with his appointment. He should make a report, annually, to the governor, or biennially to the leg-

islature, which should be published. His office should be held during good behavior, subject to removal by the governor, or better, by the Supreme Court. All correspondence with him by the patients should be inviolate, and all letters withheld by the superintendents should be submitted to him.

These are a portion of the duties that would devolve upon such an official, and it is easy to see that their proper fulfilment would be amply sufficient to occupy all his time, and that it is saying nothing to the discredit of the Board of Charities when we say that it cannot be expected of them. If all the insane in county alms-houses are to be visited as they should be, there is more than enough for two such officials in the state of Illinois to do.

In stating the necessity of such an appointment for the proper protection of the insane, we do not intend to imply any charges against the present management of our state hospitals. For all we can say, they are as well managed as the average of similar institutions in this country, and some of them probably better. But, under the present system of non-oversight, this is, like a benevolent despotism, at best only a happy accident. Nothing, however, is so absolutely perfect that improvement is not desirable, and this desirable end will be best obtained by constant oversight and judicious criticism. Moreover, such an official would be a protection not only to the insane wards of the state, but also to the asylum authorities who, however well they may strive to do their duty, are constantly liable to suffer from misapprehension and suspicion on the part of the public. If they should fail to do their duty, the value of such an honest inspection is obvious.

There is one other point worthy to be noted. Any such change in the present law as is contemplated is likely to open the way to the establishment of a certain number of private asylums. These establishments have their uses; in fact, we believe that the present lack of a certain class of them is a serious disadvantage at the present time. But of all kinds of business, this keeping of a private asylum is one that most needs proper governmental supervision, and this can be best given by the method we have indicated. In connection with the State Board of Charities, of which he

should perhaps be an *ex-officio* member, the commissioner in lunacy should examine the character and qualifications of all persons desiring to open such asylums, examine the buildings and their situation, and grant or refuse licenses accordingly. They should also have the power to revoke such licenses, once issued, for sufficient reasons, and no one should, under severe penalty, open such establishment or attempt to otherwise take the care of the insane, for profit, away from their own homes, without such license. Only in some such way as this can security against abuses be obtained.